



BILL 32-20, Solid Waste (Trash) - Waste Reduction/Source Reduction and Single-Use Straws

Dear Council President Katz and members of the Montgomery County Council,

The Montgomery County Food Council is an independent council formed and led by individual community members and representatives of local businesses, government, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions that broadly represent the food system both substantively and geographically. Our mission is to bring together a diverse representation of stakeholders to cultivate a vibrant food system in Montgomery County that consciously produces, distributes, and recycles food, making it accessible to all residents while promoting the health of the local food economy, its consumers, and the environment.

The Food Council recognizes the important role that waste reduction plays in reducing the environmental impact of our local food system. Bill 32-20 will encourage local food businesses to explore greener food serviceware options, effectively seeking to reduce the amount of plastic entering our waste streams and increase the use of compostable, reusable, and recyclable materials, to move us closer to our Zero-Waste goals. This bill will build upon the State's ongoing efforts to enhance sustainability in the food service industry, as evidenced by the passing of HB0109/SB0285, Expanded Polystyrene Food Service Products Prohibition, in 2019. Multiple jurisdictions have already had success with implementing legislation to ban single-use plastic straws; Washington D.C. began enforcing a ban on single-use plastic straws and stirrers in January of 2019, and Prince George's County introduced a plastic straw ban in November of 2019. In both cases, exemptions have been made to allow single-use plastic straws to be provided to individuals with disabilities; we applaud the inclusion of a similar provision in lines 39-41 of this bill.

However, we also recognize the immense financial pressures and supply chain challenges that local food businesses are facing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge the Council to consider the potential implications on the food and beverage businesses that may already be struggling to stock materials, adjust operations in order to comply with COVID-19 safety guidelines, and meet their bottom line. We strongly recommend the introduction of a restaurant-led campaign to phase out single-use plastic straws prior to the passage of this bill, as was successfully modeled by Washington, D.C. through the "Our Last Straw Campaign." We support the intent of Bill 32-20, and also recognize that adherence to the legislation in the foreseeable future may prove to be a challenge for struggling businesses in the wake of COVID-19.

The Food Council worked with representatives of the Montgomery County Sierra Club and Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce to develop a brief survey that was shared with restaurant owners and managers throughout the County. The survey was shared with stakeholders on Thursday, September 3rd, 2020, and was closed for responses on Friday, September 11th, 2020. In that time, 15 responses were collected, which is not a large sample size of all restaurants in the County. 12/15 respondents currently provide plastic straws only to customers, 1/15 respondents provide plastic straws only with the option of no straws, 1/15 respondents provide no straws, 1/15



respondents provide biodegradable straws. Respondents were asked to indicate the anticipated impact that a potential plastic straw ban would have on their business, with 1 being “no impact” and 10 being “significant impact.” 11/15 respondents indicated a 6 or higher on this scale, 2/15 respondents indicated a neutral response, and 2/15 respondents indicated a 3 or lower on this scale.

Additional feedback provided by survey respondents includes anticipated sourcing challenges due to supply chain issues caused by COVID-19, potentially higher costs to supply alternative straws, and needing straws for specific menu items. One restaurant also inquired about the privacy concerns related to providing straws to customers with disabilities.

The survey asked if respondents would be interested in participating in a campaign to phase out single-use plastic straws in the local food service industry; 3 responded “Yes,” 4 responded “Maybe,” 7 responded “no,” and 1 requested more information.

The Food Council has appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with food system partners to collect information from local food and beverage businesses regarding this bill. For more information regarding the survey, please contact: Catherine Nardi, Programs Manager, at cnardi@mocofoodcouncil.org.

Thank you for your continued leadership and support of our local food system during these challenging times. Please do not hesitate to contact us at the email address and phone number listed below should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Heather Bruskin

Executive Director

